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TENNIS

Fritz topples Zverev in five-set thriller to reach Wimbledon quarter-finals

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FOCUS

Barshim preparing for 'final' Olympics

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's high jump superstar **Mutaz Barshim**, who's eyes are fixed on another gold medal at the Paris Games, feels the Games will mark his final Olympic participation. "I think this would be my last Olympics. You never know. I have been around the last few years, but I think this would be my last Games," Barshim said.

The 33-year-old Barshim, who will also carry Qatar's flag at the Paris 2024 opening ceremony along with co-athlete Shahad Mohamed, has already won an Olympic gold (Tokyo 2020) and two Olympic silver medals (London 2012 and Rio 2016) besides three world championships gold, three Asian Games gold medals, five Asian In-

door Championships medals, one Military and one Arab Games gold, besides World and Asian Junior gold, and three Arab Championships golds. He also holds the Asian record in high jump.

Barshim said he seeks to set a legacy while aiming to retain his gold medal from Tokyo, aiming to set a high standard for future high jumpers to surpass. Asked about what he wants his legacy to be, Barshim said: "I want to create a legacy. When I retire, I want to look back and say: 'I've done the most that was possible...to be done.'"

"Adding one more medal, like in Paris, definitely will stretch out the lead and make it more difficult for the next high jumper...to surpass me. I want them to look at me and, hopefully to be one of the greats. I want my name to be mentioned whenever high jump is mentioned," he stressed.



Ooredoo Stars League 2024-25 to kick off on August 9

Doha: The new season of Qatar's top flight domestic football - Ooredoo Stars League 2024-25 - will kick into action on August 9, the official body - Qatar Stars League (QSL) announced on Sunday. The 12-club and 22-round annual league competition will run until April 18, 2025. The re-branded league tournament (earlier Expo Stars League) will begin with last season's runners-up Al Rayyan taking on Umm Salal at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium at 6.30pm on August 9 (Friday), while Al Khor will take on Al Gharafa at the Al Bayt Stadium at 8.30pm the same evening. Al Rayyan who will have their pre-season training camp in the Netherlands will look to assert their status as a top contender for silverware in the new season and start on a winning note. Al Gharafa, with a training camp in Slovakia shall return on August 1, eight days before their opening clash. Saturday (August 10) will see Qatar SC take on former champions Al Duhail at the Khalifa International Stadium at 6.30pm while reigning champions Al Sadd will take Al Shamal at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium at 8.30pm. The Wolves have chosen Malaga in Spain as the destination for their training camp and will return on July 29 to gear up for the opening clash. Al Shamal, who managed to extend their stay in the league after winning the relegation play-off, are currently training in Austria under their new Swedish coach Poya Asbaghi. On Sunday (August 11), Al Wakrah will meet Al Ahli at the Al Janoub Stadium (6.30pm), before the opening week concludes with a late fixture between Al Arabi and Al Shahaniya at the Al Thumama Stadium (8.30pm).

EURO 2024

'Boring' France back struggling attack to fire against Spain

'We have high expectations when it comes to Antoine and we expect a lot because he's capable'



France coach Didier Deschamps during a training session in Munich yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Munich, Germany

France coach Didier Deschamps hit back at allegations his side had reached today's Euro 2024 semi-final against Spain playing "boring" football despite failing to score a goal from open play.

France have scored just three goals so far this tournament - a Kylian Mbappe penalty and two own goals - but have made it to the last four, where they face a Spain side who have impressed most in Germany.

Under Deschamps, France have made it to the final of three of the past four major tournaments, winning the World Cup in 2018.

Asked about playing "boring football", the coach said fans could be inspired by the team's success.

"Maybe it's not the same as it was in the past, but we do have the capability to spark emotions and make lots of French men and women happy with our results, especially after a difficult period in our country.

"If you are bored, watch another game - you don't have to watch us, it's fine."

France scored 16 goals at the

2022 World Cup in Qatar, with Mbappe bagging eight. Les Bleus lost the final on penalties to Argentina. Mbappe broke his nose in France's Euros opener against Austria and missed the 0-0 draw with the Netherlands. He returned wearing a protective mask, which Deschamps said the superstar forward was still getting used to.

"We are convinced Kylian is in the right headspace, as are all of our players. He had an issue with his back, took a blow to the nose, it could have been the end of the road for him but he's still here," said Deschamps.

"His field of vision is changed and it was a huge shock to him.

"I'm convinced he will do everything he can tomorrow."

Antoine Griezmann, who scored six goals for France at Euro 2016, has also failed to fire.

"I think everyone is surprised because we know what Antoine is capable of. We saw what he pulled out of the bag at the World Cup, where he was at the peak of his powers as a player," teammate Adrien Rabiot said Monday.

"I don't know the reason... We have high expectations when it comes to Antoine and we expect a lot because he's capable. If someone's having a rough patch then

we're here to support them, but obviously it'd be better if we had the Kylian and the Antoine (we know) playing here at the Euros."

The midfielder suggested a long club season could be the reason the duo have struggled in Germany. "Their legs aren't as fresh as they could be but we're 100 percent behind them, they're players that can change the game at any point, especially if we want to get to the final!"

Rabiot backed the French to go far as a collective, saying "team spirit is more important than winning on the individual front!"

Deschamps will be more concerned about the threat of Spain, and their two attacking threats - Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams.

"These two players, even if they do not have the same qualities, offer Spain an additional quality in comparison to the teams we've faced because they've got verticality with these two players who are able to play up and down the pitch a lot more. "All the Spanish team have this ability to have great control of the ball. The midfield is a strength, with Rodri in particular. It is the team which has controlled their matches the best and left the best impression on everyone," he added.

From Platini to Zidane and Spain's golden generation: Five France vs Spain classics

Spain and France face off for a place in the Euro 2024 final today after taking contrasting routes to the semi-final clash in Munich. As France have stumbled their way through to the last four, Spain's flowing football has made them the team to beat in Germany. However, they will have to overturn a poor record against the French in major tournament competition to do so. AFP Sport looks at five classic clashes between the two nations:

Platini's Euro 84: The first meeting between two of European football's powerhouses at a major tournament did not take place until the final of Euro 1984. Hosts France emerged victorious led by the imperious Michel Platini - whose nine goals in a single tournament remains a Euros record. Platini opened the scoring at the Parc des Princes in a moment that dogged Spanish goalkeeper Luis Arconada for the rest of his career. Arconada let the French legend's low free-kick slip through his grasp before Bruno Belone chipped the Spanish goalie in stoppage time to seal France's first major tournament victory.

Djorkaef stunner at Euro 2000: France also defeated Spain 2-1 en route to their second Euros win in the Netherlands and Belgium. The quarter-final clash in Bruges was a classic featuring a free-kick from another iconic French number 10. Zinedine Zidane's sumptuous set-piece put Les Bleus in front before Gaizka Mendiet's penalty levelled. Youri Djorkaef smashed home the winner for a French side that was captained by current boss Didier Deschamps.

Zidane's last dance: France's dominance of the fixture in major tournament matches continued on German soil at the 2006 World Cup. Spain had appeared the team to beat in the group stage and went in front in the last-16 clash in Hannover through David Villa's penalty. But France hit back on their road to the final. Franck Ribery levelled with his first international goal before Patrick Vieira and Zidane - in the tournament that was his swansong - fired France into the quarter-finals.

Spain's three-peat: Spain finally managed their first competitive win over Les Bleus in the quarter-finals of Euro 2012. On his 100th international appearance, Xabi Alonso scored both goals in Donetsk with an early diving header and late penalty to seal France's fate. Spain would go on to win a third consecutive major tournament after Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup.

Mbappe wins the Nations League: The most recent meeting between the sides saw France win the Nations League final 2-1 in Milan in controversial fashion three years ago. Two goals in barely two minutes sparked the final into life as Mikel Oyarzabal fired Spain in front before Karim Benzema's stunning strike levelled matters. Real Madrid-bound Kylian Mbappe then scored the winner as a subtle stepover outfoxed Unai Simon. Spain were furious the goal was allowed to stand as Mbappe had clearly been standing in an offside position, but the VAR official did not intervene as he deemed Eric Garcia's attempted clearance as a deliberate play on the ball.



Spain's Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams during a training session in Donaueschingen yesterday. (Reuters)

FINAL BOW

Anderson 'at peace' with Test retirement

AFP
London

England great James Anderson said yesterday he had come to terms with his impending Test retirement even though he feels he is bowling as well as ever as his 42nd birthday approaches.

The first Test against the West Indies at Lord's, starting tomorrow, will be the paceman's 188th and final appearance after a record-breaking career spanning two decades.

No fast bowler has taken more than Anderson's 700 Test wickets and only India batting hero Sachin Tendulkar has played more matches in the five-day game.

Anderson might have carried on for the rest of the season even though he turns 42 at the end of July.

But the decision to retire was effectively made for him when he met with England managing director Rob Key, red-ball coach Brendon McCullum and Test captain

Ben Stokes in late April. The hierarchy told Anderson they wanted to make changes as they looked to build a squad for the 2025/26 Ashes series in Australia.

"I wouldn't say it was a surprise because when the three big dogs invited me to a hotel in Manchester for a chat I didn't think it was just a normal appraisal," Anderson told a news conference at Lord's.

"I had a suspicion that that was going to be the case. I think they were surprised at how calm I was when I reacted. I think I was probably surprised at my reaction. I wasn't overly emotional about it or angry about it or anything."

He added: "I saw their point of view and appreciated them taking the time out to lay it out for me, the reasoning and stuff like that. Since then I've come to terms with it and made peace with that decision."

In early May, Anderson released a statement saying he would retire from Test cricket after the first Test against the West Indies.

"Now I'm just looking forward to one more game and then see what's ahead," said the bowler, who



England's James Anderson poses inside the Long Room at the Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. Anderson is preparing for his final bow in Test cricket. (@englandcricket)

will serve as a mentor to England's quicks for the rest of the season.

Anderson warmed up for his Test exit with an impressive seven-wicket haul for Lancashire against Nottinghamshire last week in the English County Championship.

"I feel like I'm still bowling as well as I ever have," he said. "But I knew it had to end at some point. Whether it's now or in a year or two...I'd love just to be able to contribute somehow this week."

"Whether it's one wicket or

whatever it is, I'd love just to make a small contribution and win the game."

The normally reserved Anderson said he might struggle to keep his emotions in check while bringing down the curtain on a Test career

that started 21 years ago against Zimbabwe at Lord's.

"I'm sure the emotions during the week will change, but right now what I'm trying to focus on is to stop myself crying," he said.

Asked what had pleased him most about his lengthy Test career, he replied: "Playing my 188th Test at just short of 42 years old makes me the most proud and I'm still pushing myself to be the best I possibly can."

West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder paid tribute to Anderson by saying: "I'm sure he's got still a lot left in the tank and stuff to prove."

"I always like playing against great players and he's no doubt one of the great players of the game, so I'm looking forward to the contest for one last time."

Anderson has yet to decide whether he will keep playing for Lancashire. "The likelihood is this week is my last game of first-class cricket this season, but we'll have to see what happens," he said.

"It's a difficult one to weigh up because my emotions are all over the place."

SPOTLIGHT

Shastri calls for fewer Test teams at MCC gathering

'You have 12 Test match teams. Bring it down to six or seven'

Reuters
London

Restricting Test cricket to six or seven teams and using the 20-overs format as the vehicle to spread the game were some of the views aired at a symposium organised by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) on Sunday.

Test cricket's dwindling appeal outside India, England and Australia has coincided with the proliferation of lucrative T20 leagues across the world.

Although Test cricket at the top level still often produces drama, the brevity and action-packed nature of 20-overs cricket has quickly made it the preferred format for the game's new fans.

Former India player and coach Ravi Shastri said Test cricket must remain competitive and the only way to do so was to have only the relatively stronger teams competing in this format.

"When you don't have quality, that is when the ratings drop, there are fewer people in the crowd, its meaningless cricket, which is the last thing sport wants," Shastri said at World Cricket Connects, an event at Lord's hosted by the MCC.

"You have 12 Test match teams. Bring it down to six or seven and have promotion and relegation system."

"You can have two tiers but let the top six keep playing to sustain the interest in Test cricket."

"You can spread the game in other formats, like T20," added the former India coach.



Members of the Marylebone Cricket Club, the world's most active cricket club and the owner of Lord's Cricket Ground, get together for a group photograph.

Former Australia batter and coach Justin Langer said while he loved T20 leagues, he wanted international cricket to be protected for the impact it can have on young people.

He cited examples including West Indies fast bowler Shamar Joseph's memorial debut series in Australia this year.

"...it had Australia enthralled and it brought the Caribbean to life," Langer said.

"Last week we saw a million people turn up to see India celebrated for winning the World Cup."

"That is bilateral cricket and international cricket."

Summing up the themes, MCC President Mark Nicholas said the

views were not to suggest Test cricket was unwarranted, and that cricket needed money to sustain itself.

"T20 cricket is the behemoth that everybody wants," he said.

"It is where the new market is, where the fans are and where the money is."

"In cricket, money is seen as a dirty word but it shouldn't be because it is the only way to sustain the game."

A Question of Economics
Segment titled 'A Question of Economics' examined the financial landscape of cricket, ranging from the importance and quality of bilateral matches, maintaining fan interest, grassroots invest-

ment and the unique challenges faced by cricket in different parts of the world.

The discussion among cricket administrators highlighted key issues and opportunities within the sport. Sourav Ganguly, formerly the President of the BCCI, emphasised the complexities of cricket administration and the need for high-quality, context-rich games, particularly bilateral matches.

ECB Chair Richard Thompson stressed the importance of inclusivity and meaningful competitions, warning that fans lose interest when top-tier teams don't compete regularly. He also highlighted the role of market demand and timing in commercial success.

FOCUS

Bavuma returns to lead Proteas for Test series against West Indies

AFP
Johannesburg

Temba Bavuma will return to international cricket for the first time this year when he captains South Africa in a two-match Test series in the West Indies next month.

His lengthy absence from South African men's cricket teams illustrates what coach Shukri Conrad says is the reality of a modern cricketing world dominated by white-ball cricket.

"It is what it is and we just have to make it work," Conrad said at a press conference announcing a 16-man squad for the tour.

White-ball and English county commitments mean that Conrad will only have eight of his 16-man squad available for a pre-tour camp in Durban next week.

Bavuma was injured during South Africa's first Test against India last December and missed the second Test in which South Africa were beaten in one-and-a-half days on a sub-standard pitch.

Missed two-Test series in NZ
He then missed a two-Test series in New Zealand when South Africa sent a weakened squad to defeat in both matches because contracted players were compelled to play in the SA20, a local franchise competition.

Bavuma was not involved in the T20 World Cup in which South Africa were beaten finalists.

Most of the country's T20 stars are playing in the Major League Cricket tournament in the United States, which ends on July 28.

Those players selected for the West Indies tour will fly directly to the Caribbean in time for a warm-up match scheduled ahead of the first Test.

Conrad said he chose to take a positive view of the situation.

"We've got the luxury of a warm-up game, so we've got 10 days in Trinidad before the first Test match," he said.

"I mentioned to Temba that it's the first time as a Test unit that we're going to spend some extended time together."

"My first series was against



the West Indies (in February and March 2023) when we got together three days before the first game and we got together two days before the India series because there were Monday matches going on," he added.

"You just have to roll with the punches. It is the modern day world."

"Players can easily move from T20 and Test match cricket."

"I'm very comfortable that guys will be in America."

"They'll take a short flight across and then we'll have a week's preparation before the first Test," Conrad said.

The squad for the Tests in Trinidad and Guyana includes one uncapped player, batsman Matthew Breetzke, 25, who has played six T20 internationals and has been playing for English county Northamptonshire.

Having played only four Tests in the past year, the West Indies tour will be the start of a run of eight Tests for the Proteas through to January.

SQUAD

Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Matthew Breetzke, Nandre Burger, Gerald Coetzee, Tony de Zorzi, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Dane Paterson, Dane Piedt, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton (wkt), Tristan Stubbs, Kyle Verreyne (wkt)

Fixtures

July 31-August 3 - West Indies Invitation XI, Tarouba, Trinidad
August 7-11 - First Test, Port of Spain, Trinidad
August 15-19 - Second Test, Providence, Guyana

COMMENT

Holder has 'renewed energy' for England after Windies' success in Australia

AFP
London

West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder heads into this week's first Test against England at Lord's buoyed by the success the team achieved without him in Australia earlier this year.

The former captain missed the Australia tour to play in the ILT20 in the United Arab Emirates during January's Test series as a means of preparing himself for the recently concluded T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and the United States, where the West Indies failed to reach the semi-finals.

Holder's decision was an indication of the growing strain placed

on all format cricketers by a congested schedule and the growth of lucrative franchise leagues, which have a particular attraction to players from cricket's less prosperous international teams such as the West Indies.

"I guess over a period of time, there'll be a solution, whatever that may be," Holder told reporters at Lord's yesterday. "I guess so far, we haven't stumbled upon the solution but it is what it is. You see a couple of Kiwi (New Zealand) players have just turned down central contracts, a couple of South African players have turned down central contracts. So it is where the game is moving. It's not my job to find a solution. Each and every person has their own personal decision to make."

"I was just so happy for the boys when they when they did what they did in Australia," said Holder. "It gave me a renewed energy to come back to the group and try to be a part of something special again. I missed Test cricket. This is my first Test match in a long time, (i'm) looking forward to it."

Holder has prepared for the three-match series in England with a stint at county side Worcestershire.

"One hell of an experience," said Holder of his time at New Road. "It gave me new energy in terms of I got into a dressing room where I just felt loved. You know, the love that the boys showed me it was just second to none, and I was just really happy for that experience. I thoroughly enjoyed it. And I'm just grateful for Worcester for having me."

West Indies fast bowler Jayden Seales has also been playing county cricket for Sussex, a spell which included a Championship game against Middlesex at Lord's.

"The pitch for that game was so flat, that had nothing in it for the bowler," said Seales. I hope the Test match isn't that way."

The last four series between England and the West Indies have all been won by the home side.



Britain's King Charles speaks with quick bowling all-rounder Jason Holder (third left), during his meeting with members of the West Indies cricket team, at Buckingham Palace, London, ahead of the first Test against England. (Reuters)

OLYMPICS

Australia's Paris Games team up to 460

Reuters
Sydney

Australia will be sending their largest ever team of track and field athletes to an overseas Olympics in Paris later this month with the 75-strong squad taking the overall delegation of competitors to a final 460.

The overall delegation is the second largest for a Games since Australia hosted in Sydney, 16 athletes fewer than represented the country and won 17 gold medals at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago. "The athletics team is the largest of any sport and they will contribute greatly to the positive environment of the broader team," Chef de Mission Anna Meares said in a statement.

"Today's announcement finalises our Australian Olympic team at 460 athletes - I am so excited for Australians to see this team represent them with pride and determination in under three weeks' time," Meares said.

World champion pole vaulter Nina Kennedy and two Tokyo bronze medallists, decathlete Ash Moloney and javelin thrower Kelsey-Lee Barber, headline the track

and field squad to which 55 athletes were added yesterday.

"I have a very clear definition of what success means to me, and that is being able to walk away from the Olympic final knowing I've done everything I possibly could have," said Kennedy.

"If that wins a gold medal, amazing, and if it doesn't then I can walk away with no regrets."

Barber will form part of three-strong entry for the women's javelin with Mackenzie Little, who won bronze at last year's world championships, and 41-year-old Kathryn Mitchell, who will be appearing at a fourth Games.

Australia will send men's and women's 4x100m relay squads to Paris for the first time since the 2000 Games on home soil in Sydney and compete in 39 of the 48 athletics events.

The women's sprint relay team will feature Torrie Lewis, the teenager who beat Sha'carri Richardson and the rest of a strong field to win the 200m on her Diamond League debut in Xiamen. "After having such an amazing year getting the official selection is just a relief," the 19-year-old said. "I've always thought I could make an individual event, but actually getting the call is so exciting."



Australian basketball star Lauren Jackson and her son pose with a symbolic boarding pass in Sydney ahead of the Paris Olympic Games. Twelve years after Jackson was an Australian Olympic flag bearer and led the Opals to a fourth-consecutive Olympic medal, she's back for more at Paris 2024. (@AUSOlympicTeam)

Jackson back for 5th Olympics

At 43, Lauren Jackson will compete at a remarkable fifth Olympic Games to add another chapter to a career that has already seen her collect three silver medals (2000, 2004, 2008) and a bronze (2012) from the Olympics alone, among a

list of accolades that includes being a three-time WNBA MVP, the all-time scoring leader in the Olympic tournament and Australia's opening ceremony Flag Bearer at London 2012.

Jackson's path to Paris was hardly assured. It was only in Feb-

ruary when she declared 'I'm done' after helping the Opals qualify for Paris with an 85-52 victory over Germany in Brazil, the same country where she captained the Opals to the 2006 FIBA World Championship crown.

"Brazil has been very good to

me," Lauren said at the time. "How fitting that I get to finish my national career with Australia in Brazil. It's very special."

With the help of Basketball Australia and her family, Jackson will have the support network in place to allow her to travel with her sons and be a central part of the Australian medal push, some 24 years after her Olympic debut as a 19-year-old in Sydney 2000.

"It's been a lot for me. I've had to process a lot. I've had some pretty significant injuries the last couple of years," Jackson said.

"When I came out of retirement, I never anticipated it would get back to this point, especially after the injuries I had last year. So there has been a lot of discussion with my family, my kids, it's really impacted them, the training and the sacrifice that they have made, with me being away as much as I have."

"I've continued training while having these discussions. I put myself in the best situation I possibly could."

"There are a lot of factors, my body, my knee, but I will give it a red hot crack."

She will join Andrew Gaze, Patty Mills and Joe Ingles as the only Australian basketballers to play at five Olympics.

WIMBLEDON

Djokovic storms into quarters as Fritz beats Zverev

'I had that belief. It was just a couple of points here and there'

AFP
London

Novak Djokovic produced his best display so far at this year's Wimbledon to dispatch Denmark's Holger Rune 6-3 6-4 6-2 and reach the quarter-finals for the 15th time yesterday.

The 37-year-old Serb won the opening 12 points of Centre Court clash against the 15th seed and apart from a minor blip at the end of the second set was clinical throughout.

Djokovic squandered six set points as Rune briefly threatened to make a match of it at the end of the second set but the outcome never really looked in doubt.

The 21-year-old Rune showed flashes of brilliance which provoked chants of "Ruunne" from the evening crowd under the roof on yet another rainy day in southwest London.

But there were too many errors as his he lost a 10th successive Tour-level match against a top-five opponent.

Djokovic, bidding to match Roger Federer's eight Wimbledon titles, will contest his record-extending 60th Grand Slam quarter-final against Australia's Alex De Minaur tomorrow.

De Minaur yesterday reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals for the first time as he beat rising Frenchman Arthur Fils 6-2 6-4 4-6 6-3.

Also yesterday Alexander Zverev said he was "on one leg today" after Taylor Fritz mounted a stirring comeback from two sets down to dump the fourth seed out of Wimbledon.

Zverev appeared to be cruising towards his first quarter-final at the All England Club before an inspired Fritz turned the match around, winning 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

The American 13th seed's break in the third set was the first time big-serving Zverev had been broken in the entire tournament.

Fritz then won the fourth-set tie-break to level the match before breaking again early in the decider.

"It was amazing to do that on Centre Court, two sets down in front of this crowd. It's a dream," he said.

"The thing was I still felt I was playing really well for being down two sets. I was just thinking it sucked to be playing this well and to lose in straights."

"So let's take the third, I took it one at a time. I had that belief."



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his fourth round match against Denmark's Holger Rune yesterday. (Reuters)



Taylor Fritz of the US celebrates after winning his fourth-round match against Germany's Alexander Zverev yesterday. (Reuters)

It was just a couple of points here and there."

The American, who hit a total of 69 winners against 23 unforced errors, will face Italian 25th seed Lorenzo Musetti in the quarter-finals.

Zverev said he had struggled physically as a result of a knee injury he picked up in his win against Cameron Norrie.

"I was on one leg today," said the German, who played with a support on his left knee. "It is nothing that I need surgery on," he added. "It is nothing that doesn't heal by itself. It just needs time. I do know that also I had a great opportunity here at Wimbledon. I didn't want to pull out. Yesterday I couldn't practise at all. Yesterday I couldn't walk even."

"Today I felt much, much better. That's why I did try to play. I

also knew I did have a great opportunity this year at Wimbledon. It's the best I've probably ever felt on the Wimbledon courts."

The 27-year-old, who was runner-up at the French Open last month, played down fears he would not be able to defend his Olympic title at the upcoming Paris Games.

"I have three weeks," he said. "From what I understand, it's going to be fine in a shorter period of time."

Zverev expressed frustration over the behaviour of some people in Fritz's box, speaking to the American at the net at the end of the match.

"His team is extremely respectful. I think his coach, his physio, also his second coach, they're extremely respectful," he said.

"I think there's some other

people that maybe are in the box that are not maybe from the tennis world, that are not maybe from particularly watching every single match. They were a bit over the top."

Ostapenko beats Putintseva
Former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko beat Iga Swiatek's conqueror Yulia Putintseva 6-2, 6-3 to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals yesterday.

The 27-year-old Latvian, whose only Grand Slam title came at the French Open in 2017, broke her Kazakh opponent five times in the match, hitting 29 winners against 26 unforced errors.

"This is one of my my favourites on the tour," said Ostapenko yesterday. "I won it at juniors (in 2014) and I have great memories here."

FOCUS

Premier Padel reaches new frontier in Genova



This week Premier Padel, the leading official professional padel tour worldwide, held a stunning exhibition match onboard the iconic Giuseppe Garibaldi aircraft carrier - moored in the harbour of Genova - as part of the opening of the Genova Premier Padel P2 tournament.

The installation of a MejoSet "Full Panoramic" padel court - the first time ever on a ship of this magnitude - created an unforgettable and unique experience for all attendees, and guests were entertained to some exceptional skills from the world's leading men's and women's padel players including Arturo Coello, Agustin Tapia, Federico Chingotto, Alejandro Arroyo, Ari Sanchez, Paula Josémaria, Claudia Fernández, and Gemma Triay.

The Giuseppe Garibaldi - a historic flagship vessel of the Italian Naval Squadron - has been in operational service for almost 40 years. It has taken part in major international missions, including in Somalia, Kosovo, Lebanon and Libya and was most recently on an exercise in the Arctic Circle.

The ceremony also included

several distinguished international and regional guests including:

Capitano Marco Guerriero; Marco Bucci, Mayor of Genova; Admiral Aurelio De Carolis, Commander in Chief of the Naval Squadron. Also present at the ceremony were International Padel Federation (FIP) President, Luigi Carraro; FITP Liguria President, Andrea Fossati and Premier Padel CEO, David Sugden.

Premier Padel, chaired by Nass-er al-Khelaifi, is embarking on an exciting new dawn on a global scale as a new unified global tour.

The Qatar Airways Premier Padel Tour includes 25 tournaments in 17 countries culminating with the Qatar Airways Premier Padel Finals in Barcelona in December.

Following the conclusion of this week's tournament in Genova, the tour will head to Malaga next week for its latest P1 tournament.

Premier Padel has also announced several major partnerships in 2024 with global brands including Red Bull, Qatar Airways, Wilson, Bullpadel, Playtomic, MejoSet and Mondo which have been transformational for the official professional tour.

Vingegaard scoffs at Pogacar 'scared' slur, eyes third Tour de France win

Orléans, France: Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard yesterday dismissed Tadej Pogacar's assertion he had been "scared" on their pulsating stage 9 gravel roads struggle where the Visma man sat on the challenger's wheel at every attack.

Instead Vingegaard struck back at the slight, suggesting his defensive ploy had simply gone over Pogacar's head.

"Maybe some people don't understand our tactics but that's their problem," said the softly spoken 27-year-old.

Chalk and cheese rivals Vingegaard and Pogacar are locked in an enthralling struggle for the 2024 Tour title after the first week, separated by 1min 15sec with newcomer Remco Evenepoel sat in-between.

The deadpan Dane and his Dutch Visma team won the past two Tours adhering to classic old school tactics - waiting for the moment when you are at your strongest and your rival is at his weakest, and striking a devastating blow.

"We only focused on not losing time yesterday," said Vingegaard, the 2022 and 2023 champion, after Sunday's run over the white gravel.

Pogacar and Evenepoel, however, said it was a pity Vingegaard had not helped them attack.

"I would have loved the Tour de France yesterday if I had done that. I'd had a puncture and was riding Jan's (teammate Tratnik) bike," Vingegaard said at his team hotel in Orleans yesterday. "I have my plan and I trust it. I'm generally better in the third week," he said.

In stark contrast to the modest champion, the swashbuckling Slovenian and fan favourite Pogacar is a proponent of the new cycling, applying top speed as often as possible and engaging in relentless attacks.

The 27-year-old Vingegaard hugged Pogacar's wheel throughout the first two weeks in 2023 before crushing his rival over two days, first with the stage 16 individual time trial and the next day on the stage 17 mountain finish. Vingegaard finished the Tour in the yellow jersey, winning by 7min 29sec.

Vingegaard, however, suffered serious injuries in March and was hospitalised for 12 days, and is gingerly feeling his way back to full form.

"I've been lucky the first week hasn't been too hard," he said.

FOOTBALL

Copa America crunch-time for surviving quartet

'Going into this game, we know what's on the line. We win and go forward, we lose and go home'

AFP
Miami

The Copa America is down to the final four with a pair of fascinating semi-finals and favourites Argentina hoping they can win their third straight major title.

The Argentines, world champions and defending Copa title holders, open the semi-final action when they face surprise package Canada today in New Jersey.

Then tomorrow in Charlotte, Uruguay – who knocked out Brazil after a shoot-out on Saturday – will play a Colombia team which, unbeaten in 27 games, beat Panama 5-0 in their quarter-final.

Argentina and Uruguay, currently tied on 15 Copa America titles, are both hoping they can break that deadlock to become the most successful nation in the tournament's history. Colombia have a solitary title from 2001 while Canada are playing in the tournament for the first time.

Argentina needed penalty shoot-out heroics from their goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez to get past Ecuador in the last eight and while Lionel Scaloni's team have yet to really hit top gear they start as clear favourites against Canada.

American coach Jesse Marsch has made an instant impact with Canada, taking over in mid-May and quickly implementing his high-energy, pressing style to great effect.

Marsch, who was reported to be close to taking over as USA coach before the decision last year to re-hire Gregg Berhalter, has had the last laugh as his team have produced a memorable run to the last four while the Americans failed to get out of their group.

Canada got past a Venezuela team that had won all three of their group stage games, winning on penalties at the end of a pulsating encounter on Friday.

However, they know that Lionel Messi and Argentina represent a very different proposition.

The teams met in the opening group game of the tournament with Argentina winning 2-0, but there is no shortage of confidence in Marsch's team.

"It's going to take everything," said Bayern Munich wing-back Alphonso Davies.

"Going into this game, we know what's on the line. We win and go forward, we lose and go home. They're going to come out with everything. We're hungrier than ever, we expect a battle – as they should," he said.

Three of the four quarter-finals were decided on penalties, but Marsch insists his team will play their usual attacking style.

"The game against Argentina will have to be the best we've ever played ... We're not going to sit back and just try to defend. We will be aggressive. We're going to try to play the way we want to play and see if we can keep it up," he promised.



Alphonso Davies of Canada celebrates with Canada's head coach Jesse Marsch after the CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 quarter-final against Venezuela at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. (AFP)

Argentina's line-up remains largely the one which triumphed in the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 although Messi, troubled by a hamstring strain, has yet to per-

form anywhere near the level he showed in that tournament.

But the midfield is packed with quality options and striker Lautaro Martinez has picked up four

goals while the defence, marshalled by Lisandro Martinez, has looked solid. Colombia continue to impress under Nestor Lorenzo with the late career "second wind"

for playmaker James Rodriguez providing them with a creative spark.

Rodriguez has never quite lived up to expectations at club level but has recaptured the electric form he showed at the World Cup in Brazil 10 years ago.

"I'm having a good time. The boys are also having a very good Cup. Without their help I couldn't play well. Everything is coming together," he said after providing two assists and scoring a penalty in the thrashing of Panama.

BRUISING ENCOUNTER

Uruguay are in buoyant mood after eliminating Brazil in a bruising encounter in Las Vegas, but they will be without the suspended Nahitan Nandez and have injuries to defender Ronaldo Araujo and wing-back Matias Vina.

Veteran Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa has brought his trademark direct, hard-running style to Uruguay and that promises a game which will be high-tempo, with Colombia dangerous on the break thanks to the pace of winger Luis Diaz.

"The match against Colombia will be just as demanding (as playing Brazil) because they are a team that has been developing a lot match by match," Bielsa said.

"Like Brazil, they have important strikers in every position, but we are confident we can play on an equal footing with any opponent," he added. The Copa America final will be held in Miami on July 14.

FOCUS

England Euros semi against Dutch a 'Premier League style' clash

AFP
Wolfsburg, Germany

Netherlands defender Micky van de Ven expects the Euro 2024 semi-final against England tomorrow to be a Premier League-type clash.

The Tottenham centre-back is one of several Dutch players who play in England, along with Liverpool duo Virgil van Dijk and Cody Gakpo, among others.

England's matches have been slow-paced, largely dull affairs this summer but the meeting with the Dutch in Dortmund could produce a higher-octane duel.

"I think so," Van de Ven told reporters yesterday when asked if he anticipated a Premier League-style affair. "If you see the quality of players from both teams, you can expect the rhythm and level of the game will be really high."

"Hopefully it's us that have more of the ball than England, so it's more England that's running, but I expect a high-intensity game."

Gakpo said the Dutch would try to stop Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham from deciding the game. The 21-year-old scored a brilliant overhead kick against Slovakia in the last 16 to save England when they were on the verge of elimination.



Netherlands' forward Cody Gakpo celebrates scoring his team's second goal with his teammates during the Euro 2024 quarter-final against Turkey at the Olympiastadion in Berlin. (AFP)

"Obviously he's having a very, very good season, he's a world-class player and he made a fantastic goal," said Gakpo. "He's a player we need to watch, but I think they have more players we need to watch (too), they have a very good team with very good players, but we have a very good team as well."

England reached the semi-finals by defeating Switzerland 5-3 on penalties after a goalless draw

and Gakpo noted the quality of the Three Lions' spot-kicks.

"Their penalties were very good, but if you see the players who took them, quality players, some of them take penalties for their clubs," added the left-winger, who is joint top scorer at this Euros with three goals.

"I was impressed but not surprised. The quality is there and we know they are very good when

it comes to penalties. "Hopefully if (the semi-final) comes to penalties we will win." The Netherlands reached their first Euros semi-final since 2004 by coming from behind to beat Turkey 2-1 on Saturday, building on reaching the World Cup quarter-final in Qatar two years ago. "We are a step further than the previous tournament and I am happy that I can be part of this too," added Gakpo.

EURO 2024

England players love Southgate, says defender Shaw

Reuters
Blankenhain, Germany

Gareth Southgate is exactly what England need as a leader and he has instilled a sense of togetherness in a team who have grown stronger during Euro 2024 and have never been more motivated, defender Luke Shaw said yesterday.

Southgate is an outstanding man-manager who has the admiration of the players and was undeserving of criticism over England's stuttering run in Germany, Shaw said ahead of the semi-final against Netherlands tomorrow.

"He really took us to the next level, no manager has really been as successful as him as what he's been doing recently," Shaw told a press conference.

"It's now another semi-final and for me and us as players we love him. I think he's really good, he's exactly what we need."

"He knows how to manage his players and what their needs are and it's clear as day for me ... the real togetherness that we have inside that squad is really around what Gareth created and is what helps us dig deep in these games."

Left back Shaw missed England's first five games due to injury but is now fit, raring to go and keen to repay Southgate for standing by him. He said he felt no pressure when he made his first appearance in the tournament with England 12 minutes away from quarter-final elimination by the Swiss, and found

it more nerve-wracking watching games from the bench.

RESULT ALL THAT MATTERS

Although England have underwhelmed with a string of mediocre performances in Germany, their recent record is remarkable, with Southgate taking his side to the semi-finals in three of the past four big tournaments.

Tomorrow's match in Dortmund is a chance for England to reach their third major final and first on foreign soil, against Spain or France.

Shaw said England's stuttering progress through the tournament had tested their resilience and the squad was as tight-knit as it had ever been.

"Whether you play good or bad football, the important thing is winning games," he said.

"Whether people like it or not, the way were playing, we're in the semi-final and that's all that matters."

Shaw played a vital role in the Euro 2020 final when he fired England ahead with a superb strike after two minutes against Italy in London, only to lose in a penalty shootout, which he said was the worst he has ever felt.

"We have to have belief. The belief is definitely building with the last two games but it's down to us to deliver that on the pitch," he added.

"The motivation is massive... We're not there yet in the final we still got one massive game against a very top opposition. But yes of course the hunger and the motivation is at its highest and yes we're ready."

SPOTLIGHT

Doha Bank sponsors Al Arabi Sports Club

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Doha Bank has signed a sponsorship deal with Al Arabi Sports Club.

The agreement, part of the bank's broader social responsibility initiatives, was signed during a ceremony held at Al Thumama Stadium and attended by Doha Bank Group chief executive officer Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Thani and Al Arabi Sports Club president Sheikh Tamim bin Fahad al-Thani.

Sheikh Abdulrahman said this sponsorship underscores Doha Bank's dedication to supporting

Al Arabi Sports Club's legacy of excellence.

He hoped that it would help the club achieve even greater success in Qatari sports.

Sheikh Tamim emphasised this support will empower the club to continue its mission of attracting, developing, and nurturing top national sports talents.

"This collaboration is expected to significantly boost Qatari sports on both regional and international stages," he added.

The sponsorship agreement spans four years and covers the football, basketball, volleyball, and handball teams of one of the oldest and most popular sports clubs in Qatar.



England's head coach Gareth Southgate celebrates his team's win over Switzerland in Euro 2024 quarter-final in Dusseldorf. (AFP)